



# Home Office

## NEWS RELEASE

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### **GOVERNMENT TO CREATE NEW OFFENCE OF COERCIVE AND CONTROLLING BEHAVIOUR**

Home Secretary Theresa May has today (Thursday 18 December) announced a new domestic abuse offence of coercive and controlling behaviour.

The maximum penalty for the new offence will be five years imprisonment and a fine.

The new law will help protect victims by outlawing sustained patterns of behaviour that stop short of serious physical violence, but amount to extreme psychological and emotional abuse. Victims of coercive control can have every aspect of life controlled by their partner, often being subjected to daily intimidation and humiliation.

There are a number of ways that witness testimony could be supported at prosecution. These include using documentary evidence such as threatening emails and text messages, and bank statements that show the perpetrator has sought to control the victim financially.

The government ran a consultation over the summer seeking views on whether the law on domestic abuse needs to be strengthened. Eighty-five per cent of respondents agreed that the law does not currently provide sufficient protection to victims. Fifty-five per cent said that a new offence was needed to strengthen and clarify the law on coercive and controlling behaviour in intimate relationships.

The offence will be drafted to ensure that it is clear and proportionate and does not impact on ordinary power dynamics in relationships.

**Home Secretary Theresa May said:**

“Domestic abuse is a hideous crime that shatters the lives of victims, trapping them in cycles of abuse that too often end in tragic and untimely deaths.

“Coercive control can be tantamount to torture. In many cases, dominance over the victim develops and escalates over the years until the perpetrator has complete control. Putting a foot wrong can result in violent outbursts, with victims living in fear for their lives.

“Meeting survivors of domestic abuse and hearing their shocking stories has made me all the more determined to put a stop to this scourge on our society.

“The government is committed to protecting the victims of this terrible crime and it is clear that this new offence has the potential to save lives.”

Coercive and controlling behaviour can include the abuser preventing their victim from having friendships or hobbies, refusing them access to money and determining minute aspects of their everyday life, such as when they are allowed to eat, sleep and go to the toilet.

Victims are often afraid to end the relationship or contact police for fear of physical violence towards themselves or their children.

**Polly Neate, Chief Executive of Women’s Aid, said:**

“The government’s announcement of a new domestic violence law is a significant first step towards protecting women experiencing domestic violence.

“We welcome the Home Secretary’s announcement that the government will criminalise the patterns of coercive, controlling, and psychologically abusive behaviour which lie at the heart of the abuse so many women experience.

“We hope this new law will lead to a real culture change, so that every woman experiencing control can get the support she needs to break free safely.

“We look forward to working together with the Home Office to ensure the new law is effective, and that the police get specialist-led domestic violence training so they know how to use it. We are pleased the government has listened to the voices of survivors and professionals contained in the Domestic Violence Law Reform Campaign.”

The new offence complements major ongoing work in response to an investigation by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary on the police response to domestic abuse, commissioned by the Home Secretary. In addition to creating the new

offence, the Home Secretary is chairing a national oversight group to lead implementation of the report's recommendations and make significant and lasting improvements to how the police deal with domestic abuse.

### Notes to editors

- The consultation response will be published online at:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/strengthening-the-law-on-domestic-abuse>
- For help and advice on matters related to domestic abuse, contact the National Domestic Violence Helpline (which is run in partnership by Women's Aid and Refuge) on 0808 2000 247; Broken Rainbow on 0300 999 5428 (for LGBT people); or Respect on 0808 802 4040 (for domestic violence perpetrators).
- The Domestic Violence Law Reform Campaign is run in partnership between Women's Aid, Paladin and the Sara Charlton Foundation.

### Consultation responses include:

- "The frustration of the ignorance on the subject of coercive control makes you feel the desperation and why deaths are rising. The outside authorities do not take anything other than physical abuse seriously because they know they cannot prove it to the Courts. Education in the subject of coercive control is desperately needed and should be considered as important if not more as the affects [sic] are devastating. It is an ongoing living hell." **Victim of domestic abuse**
- "The major difference is that victims of coercive control also have to deal with the added horror that their torturer is their partner – someone they once trusted and welcomed into their life, and who has access to the victim's most intimate details to utilize as 'tools' in their torture..."

"With the law as it currently stands, some strategic perpetrators will specifically utilise small, 'personalised' acts so as to avoid the scrutiny of the law...The law fails to notice the crime within idiosyncratic behaviours that have been designed to achieve maximum harm to their recipient. Other perpetrators will use a regime of such acts to very effectively hide the recognised crimes such as rape and false imprisonment..."

"Coercive control is the most extreme and harmful form of domestic abuse and is more akin to torture than harassment." **Think-tank**